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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a list of questions for prospective faculty members to consider asking during job interviews. It includes suggestions for successful interviews, including being prepared to give a short presentation on current or recently completed research, being prepared to answer questions concerning such research, and being able to present oneself in a professional manner. The bulk of the paper consists of questions that candidates may ask the search committee (including questions related to teaching, research, service, and the school in general), the department chair, dean, and the vice-president. Some examples of the types of questions that the candidate may be asked are also included. The paper recommends asking the most important questions of several of the interviewers so as to ascertain the reliability of the information, and also to request a time frame in regard to notification about the position. (MDM)

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Interviewing for Academic Positions

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Successful Interviews for Academic Positions

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a list of questions to consider asking during interviews for academic positions. Although the list is by no means exhaustive, it is hoped that the interview will be seen as a two-way process in which both parties assume of role of interviewer and interviewee.

Successful Interviews for Academic Positions

The interview perhaps is the most influential factor in the employment process. Although curriculum vitae, cover letters, and recommendations are essential aspects which typically determine whether you will be invited for interview, the on-site interview is the final determining factor in the selection process.

All academicians involved in the interview process will use the personal interview to confirm or to negate impressions conveyed by your curriculum vita, supporting documents, and recommendations. University personnel also will attempt to assess your personality and to evaluate your potential as a professional colleague. These individuals take several aspects into account when deciding to recommend you for an academic position, including communication skills, knowledge of subject area, enthusiasm, passion, and appearance.

As part of the interview, you may be required to give a short presentation on a selected topic. Many individuals use parts of their dissertation or other finished pieces of research. It is important to be as professional as possible, which includes considering such items as visual aids and other media resources (making certain in advance that such resources are available to you and will be set up). It is a good idea to ascertain the maximum size of the audience expected. If possible, bring handouts with you. It is imperative to show enthusiasm for your study. Emphasize the importance of your study and its contribution to your field. Don't allow your presentation to last longer than the allotted time. Also, make sure you leave time for questions. Be prepared to answer questions at any time during your presentation. Show appreciation for any questions asked. Remember, aim for your presentation to be the same quality as a presentation you would give at a professional meeting. Sell yourself! This may be the only criteria the search committee uses to assess your competence both as a teacher and a researcher.

It is also a good idea to bring bound copies of any proposals or completed papers you have written in the past, which you consider to be of good quality.

These papers can be research papers, opinion papers, and the like. This, hopefully, will help to convince the interviewers of your commitment to research. If you have taught before, whether at primary, secondary, or tertiary level, it is advisable to bring samples of student work.

The literature abounds with standard questions which are asked by interviewers, as well as model responses to these questions. Such questions provide the search committee with additional information regarding your philosophies, short- and long-term academic goals, level of commitment, ability to cope with pressure, and level of preparedness for the underlying academic post. However, very little information has been provided regarding the types of questions which the interviewee should pose. Yet, asking appropriate questions not only informs the committee that you are interested in the position, but also allows you to obtain important information which will enable you to determine whether the academic position meets your needs. Following is a list of questions to consider asking various parties during the interview process.

Relevant Questions for Search Committee

The interview session with members of the search committee is often the first formal interview session (or at least one of the first interview sessions) of the day. It usually lasts between 30 minutes and 90 minutes. Since these are the individuals with whom you will working most closely if you accept a position there, it is important that you declare all of your relevant philosophies, aspirations, and goals to this group of people. The following questions should be considered:

Teaching:

- (1) Does your university use a quarter or a semester system?
- (2) When does the fall term begin?
- (3) How many credits are awarded for the course which I will be expected to

teach?

- (4) What teaching load can I expect to have?
- (5) How long does each teaching session last?
- (6) What is the ratio of graduate to undergraduate courses I will be expected to teach?
- (7) What is the background of students I would be expected to teach with respect to year of study and major?
- (8) What is the range of class size I can expect?
- (9) What is the role of faculty in scheduling courses?
- (10) Are there any departmental textbooks for the courses I will be expected to teach? If so, which ones?
- (11) How much flexibility can I expect to have with respect to selecting (alternative) textbooks?
- (12) How much flexibility can I expect to have for selecting course content/material?
- (13) How much flexibility can I expect to have with respect to teaching style and the use of teaching aids?
- (14) What teaching aids/resources would be available to me?
- (15) What is the departmental policy on photocopying teaching material?
- (16) How much scope is there for obtaining other relevant teaching aids?
- (17) What are the requirements for office hours?
- (18) How much flexibility can I expect to have for teaching summer school courses? What is the maximum number of courses which I can expect to teach at summer school?
- (19) Can I expect to have any graduate assistants at my (part) disposal?
- (20) What would my role be with respect to advising students working on their dissertations/theses?
- (21) Do students have the opportunity to evaluate my teaching? If so, what is the format of these evaluations and how regularly are they administered?
- (22) What weight do these evaluations have with respect to my application for promotion/tenure?

- (23) What is the scope for off-site teaching?
- (24) Is any form of peer review/evaluation in operation?
- (25) How much flexibility can I expect to have with respect to teaching other courses in the future?
- (26) How much weight does teaching have in relation to research and service?
- (27) Does the promotion/tenure review board incorporate portfolio assessments?
- (28) What are the teaching goals of the department and to what extent are they being realized at present?
- (29) What is the length of time which must elapse before I can apply for promotion/tenure?
- (30) Do I have to apply for tenure and promotion at the same time?
- (31) Do you have a "fast" track tenure system?

Research

- (1) What are the expectations of the department with respect to research?
- (2) How much emphasis is put on research in relation to teaching and service?
- (3) How is research reviewed annually?
- (4) How much and what types of departmental support are allocated to research?
- (5) What scope is there for me to write grants?
- (6) What support is available to assist me in writing grants?
- (7) Are there any research funds available for beginning assistant professors?
- (8) How much contact, with respect to research, is there between the department/university and the public schools and local community?
- (9) What computer services/technology/library resources are at my disposal to assist me with my research endeavors?
- (10) What equipment can I expect to have in my office to assist me in my research endeavors?
- (11) Is there some kind of sponsored research program unit? If so, what is their role?
- (12) What are the expectations of the department for grant-writing?
- (13) To what extent is co-authorship encouraged?

- (14) How much weight do joint publications have with respect to the annual professional activity report?
- (15) Are travel expenses provided for professional meetings? If so, how much is allocated?
- (16) Would I be able to attend the most relevant annual professional meetings for my field, even if it took place during the regular semester/quarter? If so, how easy is it to organize a substitute instructor?
- (17) Would I be able to utilize any graduate assistants to help me with my research endeavors?
- (18) How many graduate assistants work for the department?
- (19) How closely do graduate assistants work with faculty members?
- (20) Are there any types of research stipends available in the summer?

Service

- (1) What are the expectations of the department with respect to service?
- (2) How much emphasis is put on service in relation to teaching and research?
- (3) How is service reviewed annually?
- (4) What is the expectation of the department with respect to the four main service areas, namely, (i) program, (ii) department, (iii) college or university, and (iv) community?
- (5) How much service is devoted to the public schools?
- (6) What scope is there for me to provide in-house consultation services?
- (7) What is the policy of the department with respect to consulting for outside agencies?
- (8) Are there any constraints on working with the state department?

This list is by no means exhaustive. You may find that you are unable to ask all of these questions within the time allotted. If this is the case, you can always present any unanswered questions to other individuals with whom you interview.

In turn, members of the search committee may ask you the following questions:

- (1) What qualities will you bring to our department if you were to accept this position?
- (2) What are your strengths as a teacher/researcher?
- (3) What are your weaknesses as a teacher/researcher?
- (4) What are your philosophies?
- (5) What would be your short/long-term plans if you were to accept this position?

Be prepared to answer these questions!!!

During breakfast, lunch, or dinner, it may be a good idea to ask "lighter" questions (which often help to fill in any gaps in the conversation) such as the following:

Miscellaneous Questions

- (1) What scope do I have for enrolling in courses?
- (2) What recreational facilities are available to faculty members?
- (3) What housing options are available to me?
- (4) How long has each faculty member been teaching at the university?
- (5) How long has the university been in existence?
- (6) What is the parking situation for faculty members?

Relevant Questions for Department Chair

Any questions which you were unable to ask could be presented to the department chair (assuming that you are scheduled to be interviewed separately by the chair). Important questions to ask the chair are:

- (1) What is the philosophy of the department?
- (2) What are the long-term goals of the department?
- (3) To what extent does this department conduct research in unison with other departments?
- (4) On what types of committees might I be expected to serve?
- (5) What type of faculty orientation is available?
- (6) What scope is there for me to teach summer school?
- (7) Is there a merit pay system? If so, how does this system work?
- (8) What is the policy regarding tenure and promotion?

Relevant Questions for the Dean

- (1) How many graduate/undergraduate students are in the college/department?
- (2) When would I be expected to start work, if offered the position?
- (3) What is the policy on sabbaticals?
- (4) What is the policy on tenure and promotion?
- (5) What is the philosophy of the college?

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You will probably find that the Dean of the department will give you the salary range for the position for which you are being interviewed. Thus, it is usually not necessary (and may not even be a good idea) to initiate conversations about salary. The dean also should give you information, albeit brief, about health insurance, life insurance, policies for income/employment insurance (disability insurance), pension and retirement plans,

Relevant Questions for the Vice President

Important questions to ask the vice president are:

- (1) What is the philosophy of the university?
- (2) What is the emphasis placed on teaching, research, and service?
- (3) What are the long-term goals of the university?

- (4) To what extent does the university collaborate with other educational institutions, public schools, state agencies, local businesses, and the community?

Closing Comments

It is probably a good idea towards the end of the interviewing process, to ask either the department chair or the dean what the time frame is for notifying you, and also what form the notification will take. It is wise to stress to this person the importance of informing you of their decision one way or the other, because some departments are a bit "shy" in divulging this piece of information to interviewees, and may, indeed, never notify you, or notify you after several months. Be assertive. Let her/him realize the importance of dealing with you in a professional manner.

It is also probably a good idea to present your most important questions to several of the interviewers. This is a good way to ascertain "reliability" of information. Just remember that you are interviewing all the faculty members to the same extent that they are interviewing you. It is a two-way process. So don't be afraid to ask questions. It is only by asking questions that you can be absolutely sure that you (1) you are suitably qualified for the position and (2) that the position is suitable for you!

GOOD LUCK IN YOUR INTERVIEWING PROCESS!